The Greater and Lesser Lights

Masonic Booklet No. 3.

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The Greater and Lesser Lights

NOTES TAKEN FROM WELL-KNOWN OCCULT AND MASONIC AUTHORITIES
by the
ENTERED APPRENTICES
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The Greater and Lesser Lights

Among the beautiful symbols of Freemasonry, that of Light has a specially wide and significant meaning as has been seen. It is necessary now to understand the significance of the special Lights used to adorn a Lodge room.

"Freemasons are enlightened by Great and Small Lights. The Bible, the square and the compasses belong to the first; and the sun, the moon," and Mercury, or the Master of the Lodge, "to the second. The Great Lights are immortal, and neither limited by time nor space; the small ones are limited by both. The Bible rules and governs our faith; the square our actions; and the compasses keep us in a bond of union with all mankind, especially a brother Mason."*

* Gadicke, Dictionary of Symbolic Masonry, George Oliver, D.D., p. 528.

I.

1.

THE SACRED VOLUME

THE FIRST GREATER LIGHT

"Every Mason knows that in each Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, there is placed in a conspicuous position, so that every eye may behold it, a Divine luminary, . . . known and designated as a Great Light. . . .

"From its place in the centre of the Lodge, it pours forth upon the East, the South and the West, its refulgent rays of Divine truth. This Great Light is set as a beacon to illuminate the whole mind and spirit of man. . . . To the humble, it is ever a lamp to their feet and a light to their path, illuminating them through the dark wastes and rugged paths of Life's journey."*

* Freemasonry in All Ages, Rev. M. F. Carey, 33°, pp. 7 and 8.

The great luminary in English-speaking Lodges is generally the Bible. This is not the only book, however so used by Masons. Other sacred volumes may take its place. "The Bible is," to all who look to it for Light, "a symbol of the will of God. Whatever, therefore, to any people, expresses that will, may be used as a substitute for the Bible. Thus, in a Lodge consisting entirely of Jews, the Old Testament alone may be placed upon the altar—and the Turkish Masons make use of the Koran. Whether it be the Gospels to the Christian, the Pentateuch to the Israelite, the Koran to the Mussulman, or the Vedas to the Brahman, it everywhere Masonically conveys the same idea—that of the Divine will revealed to man."†

But it must be remembered that besides these Sacred Volumes, there are other teachings pointing to the Will of God. The books spoken of are to a

† Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey, Hughan and Hawkins, vol. I, p. 104.

large extent for the outer circle, for exoterics—but for the inner, the enlightened, "there exists the Secret Doctrine, the Ancient Wisdom, everywhere one and identical, professed and practised by the Initiates, of every country, who alone were aware of its existence and importance."* †

"The Secret Doctrine teaches that man has an intimate relation to the Solar Logos who springs from the Absolute, the Unconditioned One—and that the Great Solar Logos is the Grand Architect of the Universe. It teaches too, that there are many hierarchies of celestial Beings, which stand upon the many different rungs of the Jacob's ladder of attainment that stretches from man to God and beyond." . . . It teaches that many, many worlds exist, and that "the worlds and cosmic planes are not one above another in space, but that they are states of spirit-matter that

* Isis Unveiled, Blavatsky, vol. II, p. 99.
† Appendix 1.

permeate one another—so that God and the other Great Beings who are mentioned are not far away in space. They pervade every part of their own realm and realms of greater destiny than their own. They are all present in our world, and are actually, as a matter of fact, 'nearer than hands and feet.' It is a literal truth when we say 'in Him we live and move and have our being,' for none of us could exist outside these Great Intelligences who pervade and sustain our world with Their Life.''*

These and many other glorious truths does the Secret Doctrine reveal. And when one looks to the Great Light, the Bible, open upon the altar, it should shed upon him, a vast, a great, or a smaller Light, according to his powers of perception. If an evolved soul, he will see the inner teachings, and bend in reverence and thankfulness before the Gods, for what the Bible represents. As

* Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception, Heindel, pp. 177 and 179.

a luminary, it is like our outer and visible sun, through which one may look to that Inner and Spiritual Sun—that glorious Being who supports and sustains all Universes in manifestation.†

The Secret Doctrine, as has been said, proclaims the intimate relation of man to God, and that in Him we live and move and have our being. The Bible *also* "reveals to us the glorious and all-comforting truth that God is our Creator—that He is our Father in Heaven, and that we are His children. It proclaims too, the great fact of the *universality* of the Fatherhood of God, and the *universality,* too, of the Brotherhood of Man. These grand truths are received and especially emphasized by the Fraternity of Masons, not as a mere rhetorical expression, but as a precious

† "The Bible is not kept on the altar in English Lodges. It is, however, in the Lodge, but is on the Master's pedestal." The Great Light, by George W. Baird, P. G. M., 33° Hon., in The New Age, March, 1919, p. 106.

revelation of the relation of God to His children, and of the relation which His children should bear to one another.''*

For the ''whole world is but one Republic of which each nation is a family, and every individual, a child. Masonry, not in any way derogating from the differing duties which the diversity of states requires, tends to create a new people, which, composed of many nations and tongues, shall all be bound together by the bonds of Science, Morality and Virtue.''†

''In fine, the real object of Freemasonry may be summed up in these words: To efface from among men, the prejudices of caste, the conventional distinctions—origin, opinion, nationality; to annhilate fanaticism and superstition, extirpate national discord, and with it, extinguish the firebrand of war;

* Freemasonry in All Ages, Rev. M. F. Carey, p. 10.

† Morals and Dogma, Pike, p. 220, as found in Mystic Masonry, J. D. Buck, pp. 65 and 66.

in a word, to arrive, by free and pacific progress, at one formula or model of eternal and universal right, according to which, each individual human being shall be free to develop every faculty with which he may be endowed and to concur heartily and with the fullness of his strength in the bestowment of happiness upon all, and thus to make of the whole human race, one family of brothers, united by affection, wisdom and labor.''*

The aim of Freemasonry, then, "is practically to carry out to their fullest extent, the lessons of mutual love and mutual aid, that are such essential features of a Brotherhood. The socialism of Freemasonry, like that of Christianity, has a high ideal.''†

It is thus that Freemasonry has benefitted by the teachings of the Sacred vol-

* Rebold's History of Masonry, p. 62, as found in Mystic Masonry, by J. D. Buck, pp. 65 and 66.

† Freemasonry in All Ages, Rev. M. F. Carey, p. 161.

ume—it is thus that it has become glorified by the first and the greatest of the Greater Lights.

"The history of the Masonic symbolism of the Bible is interesting. It is referred to in the manuscripts before the revival, as the book upon which the *covenant* was taken, but it was never referred to as a Great Light. In the old ritual, there is no mention of the Bible as one of the Lights. Preston made it a part of the furniture of the Lodge; but in the ritual of about 1760, it is described as one of the three Great Lights.‡

‡ Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey, Hughan and Hawkins, vol. I, p. 104-5.

2

THE SQUARE

THE SECOND GREATER LIGHT

"This is one of the most important and significant symbols in Freemasonry. As such, it is proper that its true form should be preserved. The French Masons have almost universally given it with one leg shorter than the other, thus making it a carpenter's square. The American Masons following the incorrect delineations of Jeremy L. Cross, have, while generally preserving the equality of length in the legs, unnecessarily marked its surface with inches; thus making it an instrument for measuring length and breadth, which it is not. It is simply the *trying square* of a stonemason. It has a plain surface—the equal sides or legs embracing an angle of ninety degrees—and is intended only to test the accuracy of the

sides of a stone, and to see that its edges subtend the same angle.*

"In architecture, not only are the corners of the building proved by the square, but all horizontal and perpendicular lines are drawn by it. Without accurate squaring, a building would be weak and tottering in the first stages of erection, and must continue unfinished. Without a well-defined and very clear code of the reciprocal laws and duties of the officers and members of any social, charitable, or scientific society, it is impossible for it to avoid being completely overthrown in a very short time. Perfect legality is the only sure foundation for any society, and by it alone, bodies of men are kept within proper limits; for as soon as arbitrary power and physical force usurp the place of the laws of any society, it speedily becomes defunct; with great propriety, therefore, is the square put into

* Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey, Hughan and Hawkins, vol. II, p. 708.

the hands of the Worshipful Master in order that he may keep the brethren within the square of the ancient charges of Freemasonry. The symbol must at all times, and in all places, be regarded as a Great Light, and the genuine Freemason is not only reminded by this Light to do his duty to his brethren, but to all mankind.''*

"In Freemasonry, the square is a symbol of morality. This is its general signification, and is applied in various ways: It presents itself, 1. To the neophyte, as one of the three Great Lights; 2. To the Fellow-Craft, as one of his working-tools; and 3. To the Master Mason, as the official emblem of the Master of the Lodge. Everywhere, however, it inculcates the same lesson of morality, of truthfulness, and of honesty. So universally accepted is this symbolism, that it has gone outside of the Order, and has been found in col-

* Gadicke, Dictionary of Symbolical Masonry, George Oliver, D.D., p. 673-4.

loquial language communicating the same idea. 'Square', says Halliwell, (Dict. Archaisms), 'means honest, equitable, as in "square dealing." ' "To *play upon the square* is proverbial for *to play honestly*. . . .

"As a Masonic symbol, it is of very ancient date, and was familiar to the Operative Masons. In the year 1830, the architect, in rebuilding a very ancient bridge called Baal bridge, near Limerick, in Ireland, found under the foundation-stone an old brass square, much eaten away, containing on its two surfaces the following inscriptions: "I WILL. STRIUE. TO. — LIUE. — WITH. LOUE. & CARE. — UPON. THE. LEUEL.—BY THE. SQUARE," (I will strive to live with love and care upon the level—by the square), and the date, 1517. The modern speculative Mason will recognize the idea of *living on the level and by the square*. This discovery proves, if proof were necessary, that the familiar idea was borrowed

from our Operative brethren of former days.

"The Square as a symbol in Speculative Masonry, has presented itself from the very beginning of the revival period. In the very earliest catechism of the 18th century, of the date of 1725, we find the answer to the question, "How many make a Lodge?" "God and the Square, with five or seven right or perfect Masons." God and the Square, religion and morality, must be present in every Lodge as governing principles.

"Signs at that early period, were to be made by squares, and the furniture of the Lodge was declared to be the Bible, Compasses and Square.

"In all rites and in all languages where Masonry has penetrated, the square has preserved its primitive significance as a symbol of Morality."*

* Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey, Hughan and Hawkins, vol. II, p. 708.

3

THE COMPASSES

THE THIRD GREATER LIGHT

As said above, "'The compasses ought to keep us within the bonds of union with all mankind, but especially with our brother Masons;' and may every one whose hands have lifted this Great Light, continue to be guided by it in all his actions!

"By the compasses the skilful architect is enabled accurately to determine the relative proportions of all parts of the building, when he is laying it down upon the tracing-board for the use of the workmen. Without accurate measurement—and thereby acquired symmetry and eurythmy, or beautiful and skilful proportioning of all its parts unto the whole—architectural beauty is not attainable. Without cultivated and amiable conduct, without benevolent feelings

and charitable actions towards each other, no endearing bond amongst mankind is conceivable; for so long as mankind confine themselves to acts of justice alone to each other, so long must they be kept asunder by cold civility. It is only the calm affection of pure philanthrophy which can unite them in the closer bonds of fraternal affection.'"* †

"Hence are the compasses the most prominent emblem of virtue, the true and only measure of a mason's life and conduct. As the Bible gives us light on our duties to God, and the square illustrates our duties to our neighborhood and brother, so the Compasses give us that additional light, which is to instruct us in the duty we owe to ourselves —the great and imperative duty of circumbscribing our passions, and keeping

* Gadicke, Dictionary of Symbolic Masonry, George Oliver, D.D., p. 468.

† A circle drawn by the compasses in an emblem of eternity. This emblem is commonly represented by a Serpent, in the form of a circle. (Gadicke).

our desires within due bounds. "It is ordained," says the philosophic Burke, "in the eternal constiution of things, that men of intemperate passions cannot be free."

"Those brethren who delight to trace our emblems to an astronomical origin, find in the compasses a symbol of the sun, the circular pivot representing the body of the luminary, and the diverging legs his rays.

"In the earliest rituals of the last century, the compasses are described as a part of the furniture of the Lodge, and are said to belong to the Master. Some change will be found in this respect in the ritual of the present day."‡

Pike says in regard to the Square and Compasses, "The Square is a right angle, formed by two right lines. It is adapted only to a plane surface, and belongs only to geometry, earth-measurement, that trigonometry which deals

‡ Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey, Hughan and Hawkins, vol. I, pp. 173 and 174.

with planes, and with the Earth, which the ancients supposed to be a plane. The Compass describes circles, and deals with spherical trigonometry, the science of the spheres and heavens. The former, therefore, is an emblem of what concerns the Earth and the body; the latter, of what concerns the heavens and the soul. Yet the Compass is also used in plane trigonometry, as in erecting perpendiculars; and therefore, you are reminded that . . . the divine ever mingles with the human; with the earthly the spiritual intermixes; and there is something spiritual in the commonest duties of life." In addition, he states that nations are not bodies-politic alone, but also souls-politic, and exclaims "Woe to that people which seeking the material only, forgets that it has a soul!"§

§ Morals and Dogma, Pike, pp. 11 and 12.

2 and 3

SQUARE AND COMPASSES

TWO GREATER LIGHTS COMBINED

"These two symbols, teaching us to square our actions and to keep them within due bounds, have been so long and so universally combined, that they are seldom seen apart. They are so kept together—either as two Great Lights, or as a jewel worn by the past-Master of the Lodge, though once worn by the Master—that they have come at last to be recognized as the proper *badge of a Master Mason,* just as the triple tau is, of a Royal Arch Mason, or the passion cross, of a Knights Templar.

"So universally has this symbol been recognized, even by the profane world, as the peculiar characteristic of Free-masonry, that it has recently, in the

United States, been made the subject of a legal decision.* †

"In a religious work by John Davies, entitled "Summa Totalis," or "All in All and the Same Forever," printed in 1607, we find an allusion to the square and compasses by a profane, in a really Masonic sense. The author who proposes to describe mystically the form of the Deity, says in his dedication:

"Yet I this forme of formelesse DEITY,
Drewe by the Squire and Compasse of our Creed."‡ §

* Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey, Hughan and Hawkins, vol. II, p. 708.

† Appendix 2.

‡ Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey, Hughan and Hawkins, vol. II, p. 709.

§ Appendix 3.

1, 2 and 3

THE BIBLE, SQUARE AND COMPASSES

THREE GREATER LIGHTS COMBINED

As said above, the three Greater Lights are of use to us in the following ways: "The Bible gives us light on our duties to God, the Square illustrates our duties to our neighborhood and brother, and the Compasses give that additional light, which is to instruct us in the duty we owe to ourselves—the great imperative duty of circumscribing our passions, and keeping our desires within bounds." They do something further, however. They speak to us of the Power, Wisdom and Beneficence of the Deity, for they are symbols of His First three Emanations.*

* Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey Hughan and Hawkins, vol. I, p. 174.

II.

1

THE LESSER LIGHTS

The Lesser Lights, like the Greater Lights, are three in number. They are the symbolic lights "that light us to and from labor," and they are "situated in the East, West and South, in allusion to the apparent course of the sun, which, rising in the East, gains its meridian in the South, and disappears in the West. These luminaries represent emblematically, the Sun, the Moon, and the Master of the Lodge."‡

"These Lesser Lights form the Triangle—the symbol of the Spirit, and they surround the square altar, symbolising thus, the union of Spirit and matter, or the reaching out of matter towards Spirit."

‡ Dictionary of Freemasonry, George Oliver, D.D., p. 571.

"There is no Light in the North because King Solomon's Temple, of which every Lodge is a representation, was placed so far north of the ecliptic, that the Sun and Moon at their meridian height could dart no rays into the northern part thereof. The North, therefore, we Masonically call a place of darkness."* †

* Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey, Hughan and Hawkins, vol. I, p. 442.

† Fixed Lights—According to the rituals of the last century every Lodge room, in addition to the Greater and Lesser Lights, was furnished —or supposed to be furnished—with three windows, situated in the East, West and South. They were called the "Fixed Lights," and were supposed to be "to light the men to, at and from their work." (Ibid, p. 447).

AN INNER LIGHT

AN INDIVIDUAL LIGHT FOR EACH BROTHER

Though not strictly technical perhaps, though its interpretation serves as a basis for the Masonic teaching of universal Brotherhood—another Light must be spoken of before closing. This is the "Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Reference is made to the God or Christ that dwells in the heart of each of us.‡

According to the Kabalah—and Occultism also tells of the same number of lights—"there are three kinds of Light, (1) the clear and penetrating Light, that of Jehovah; (2) reflected Light; and (3) Light in the abstract. This last Light is Alhim, (Elohim, God), while the clear and penetrating light is Jehovah. The Light of Alhim belongs to the world in

‡ Morals and Dogma, Pike, p. 743.

general, in its allness and general fulness, but the Light of Jehovah is that pertaining to man, whom the Light penetrated to and made.*

Every man then is a spark of the Divine Fire. That Light is his life, and it is this spark which assures him, not only of ultimate perfection, but of ultimate Godhood.

The Bhagavad Gita says, "Within thyself, thou hast a sublime friend thou knowest not. God dwells within all men, though few know how to find Him. The man who sacrifices his desires, and works for the Being whence proceed the principles of all things, and by whom the universe has been formed, attains to perfection by such sacrifice. For he who finds *in himself* his happiness, his joy and light, is one with God. Know then, that the soul which has found God, is freed from re-birth and from death, from old age and from pain; such a soul drinks the waters of immortality."

* The Secret Doctrine, H. P. Blavatsky, vol. II, p. 41.

"Every thought of purity,
Every deed of right,
Conquers sin's obscurity,
Speeds the reign of Light."‡

† Reincarnation, E. D. Walker, p. 323.

APPENDIX

1

Initiation.—The receiving of the higher knowledge and the powers that come therewith.

"Initiation has to do with secret rites which are reserved for those only who have been prepared."

There are said to be four great initiations before the soul may attain Nirvana or liberation. The first of these—the sohan of the Buddhists, the parivrajaka of the Hindus—takes place when the aspirant passes from the Probationary Path to the Path Proper, a definitely accepted chela.

With reference to initiations into the ancient mysteries, such as those of Bacchus and Eleusis, we have but fragmentary information.*

* Dictionary of Theosophical Terms, Powis Hoult, pp. 58 and 59.

2

Legal Decision as to Trade-Mark of Square and Compasses combined.—"A manufacturer of flour having made, in 1878, an application to the Patent Office for permission to adopt the Square and Compasses as a trade-mark, the commissioner of patents refused the permission on the ground that the mark was a Masonic symbol.

"If this emblem," said Mr. J. M. Thacher, the commissioner, "were something other than precisely what it is—either less known, less significant, or fully and universally understood—all this might readily be admitted. But considering its peculiar character and relation to the public, an anomalous question is presented. There can be no doubt that this device, so commonly worn and employed by Masons, has an established mystic significance, universally recognized as existing; whether comprehended by all or not, is not ma-

terial to this issue. In view of the magnitude and extent of the Masonic organization, it is impossible to divest its symbols, or at least this particular symbol—perhaps the best known of all—of its ordinary significance, whenever displayed, either as an arbitrary character or otherwise. It will be universally understood, as having a Masonic significance; and, therefore, as a trademark, must constantly work deception. Nothing could be more mischievous than to create as a monopoly, and uphold by the power of the law, anything so calculated, as applied to purposes of trade, to be misrepresented, to mislead all classes, and to constantly foster suggestions of mystery in affairs of business.''*

3

Square and Compasses combined, Union of Old and New Testaments.—One Masonic writer speaks thus of the

* Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey, Hughan and Hawkins, vol. II, p. 708-9.

square and compasses combined:—"The square and the compass represent the union of the Old and the New Testaments. None of the high degrees accept this interpretation, however, although their symbolism of the two implements differs from that of symbolic Masonry. The square is with them, peculiarly appropriated to the lower degrees, as founded on the Operative art; while the compasses, as an implement of higher character and uses, is attributed to the degrees which claim to have a more elevated and philosophical foundation. Thus they speak of the initiate, when he passes from the Blue Lodge to the Lodge of Perfection, as 'passing from the square to the compass,' to indicate a progressive elevation in his studies. Yet even in the high degrees, the Square and Compass combined, retain their primitive signification as a symbol of Brotherhood and as a badge of the Order."*

* Berage in his work on the High Degrees—"Les plus secrets Mysteres des Hauts Grades." Also, Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Mackey, Hughan and Hawkins, vol. II, 709.